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ABSTRACT

Information servi s in 19xx is the province of a relatively new, highly professionalized group of people known as Certified Information Consultants (CIC). The training of a CIC emphasizes first a grounding in various subject fields, followed by intensive study in the information characteristics and needs of established clientele groups, and the development of expertise in identifying and studying such groups. The typical CIC operates as an independent professional, somewhat as lawyers did in the 1970s. Typically, a client will come to the CIC's office by appointment and describe the particular problem area in which he needs information. Through this interview, the CIC determines the parameters of the client's information needs and prepares a detailed prescription which will be filled by the CIC's staff of researchers. A variety of data bases will be used, some perhaps custom-made for the client. This method of operation is clearly preferable to the previous thrust of information work, which involved the building of massive data bases with little attention to their social utility or to effective access to their content. (Author/SL)

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SCENARIO FOR INFORMATION SERVICE, 19XX

A FORECAST

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Information service in 19xx is the province of a relatively new, highly professionalized group of people known as Certified Information Consultants. The genesis of this group was in a few individuals who called themselves information scientists in the 1970's, and a few individuals who were serving at that time as reference librarians, when libraries were shorn of their non-custodial functions by lack of funds. Subsequent membership in the group came from behavioral scientists interested in identifying various information-using groups and seeking to determine their information needs, and from subject specialists in various disciplines who developed expertise in the design of particularized data bases, incorporating all forms of materials, for highly specific groups of information-users. About five years ago, a few academic programs leading to the professional degree of Information Consultant emerged, along with licensing laws for information consultants in all states. Licensing laws had been necessitated by the welter of people of incredibly diverse backgrounds and degrees of preparation who attempted to enter information consultant practice because of the heavy demand for such services in both the public and private sectors of the economy.

Prerequisite to enrollment in the curriculum leading to the degree of Information Consultant is one of the new Survey Master's degrees in a discipline, a two year program surveying all subfields in some depth, of the discipline in which the degree is sought. The main thrust of the Information Consultant curriculum is intensive study of previously identified clientele groups and their information-related characteristics and needs, plus development of expertise in the methodology of identifying and studying such groups, drawn mostly from the accumulated methodological wisdom of anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and sociology.

The typical Certified Information Consultant (hereafter, CIC) operates as an independent professional somewhat as many lawyers did in the 1970's. The usual CIC's office would be staffed by, in addition to the CIC, a receptionist, and several secretaries and researchers, who are usually in some stage of preparation for professional status as CIC's themselves. Of course, some CIC's are retained by corporate and governmental entities, but being in the position of an independent professional seems to give an advantage in practice because of the almost incredible array of diverse forms in which information is found, and the sources from which it must be obtained. Access to proprietary and otherwise confidential information is difficult for CIC's on retainer to obtain in some cases, but the independent CIC is seldom denied access to such information, inasmuch as the ethics of the profession are very explicit on matters of conflict of interest between sources and users of information.

The work of the CIC has been greatly aided by the passage of the law in the 1970's which restricted the copyright only to non-transformable information, and placed all transformable information immediately in the public domain. (1) Unfortunately, this law contributed to the chaos in the information situation which ultimately culminated in the licensing laws for CIC's.

Although there is some variety in the services performed by CIC's, just as in the services of CPA's, lawyers, and the like, the typical pattern is about as follows. A client comes to the CIC's office by appointment, where he spends thirty to sixty minutes describing the particular problem area for which he needs information. Through this interview, the CIC determines the parameters of the client's information need and prepares a detailed prescription which will be filled by the CIC's staff. The time frame is specified at this point, from possibly an hour

or two to a few days, depending upon the scope of the information required and the probable time necessary to obtain it. The CIC's fee is estimated at this time, as a function of the number of standardized information units apparently involved, and the time frame established. The format of delivery to the client is also specified, e.g., hard copy or microform. Since optical character recognition devices have long since been perfected, either format can be used for direct input to electronic data processing systems, and special preparation of machine-readable material is unnecessary.

The CIC's staff proceeds to fill the prescription as written. This could involve something as simple as obtaining a few COM transparencies from an EDP service bureau, or preparing COM transparencies from the CRT terminal which gives the CIC access to the procognitive system. (2) It could even involve going to a library to microfilm some hard copy in the old-fashioned book and journal formats. The development of the pocket-sized eight millimeter microfilm camera, and ultra-high speed, ultra-high resolution microfilm, back in the 1970's, made possible fully satisfactory microfilming of documentary materials under circumstances similar to those in old espionage movies.

If the client's information problem requires a custom-tailored data base for repeated use, rather than developing some specific answers on a one-time basis, the custom-made data base is assembled and kept by the CIC in microform, updated as necessary to incorporate new relevant information or to reflect changes in the client's needs. This approach is popular with business and industrial clients, since it eliminates the necessity to maintain some kind of information processing and retrieving apparatus on the client's premises.

Older members of the American Information Consultants' Association agree

that society's recognition of the importance and value of information service dates from the time when serious efforts began to be made to identify specific clientele groups and to study in depth their information needs. The previous thrust of information work, to build massive data bases with little attention to their social utility or really effective access to their content, clearly had been misguided.

CITATIONS:

(1) For a discussion of transformable and non-transformable information, see J. C. R. Licklider, Libraries of the Future (Cambridge: The M. I. T. Press, 1965), p. 2.

(2) Ibid., p. 6; p. 45 et sqq.